



What to Do About Rats or Mice in Your Home or Business

The presence of rats or mice in your home or business is not only a nuisance but could also cause property damage and disease. Coming in contact with these pests, or their urine or feces, has been linked to several different human diseases, including, but not limited to, leptospirosis, typhus, rat-bite fever, and salmonellosis. The activities of the rodents can also lead to significant property damage from gnawing and digging; examples include the contamination of food and beverages and damage to food containers, wood particle boards, insulation, and electrical wiring. Damage to wiring is particularly troubling because it can increase the risk of a structural fire. Therefore, the prevention of rats and mice from entering your home or business or the appropriate control and removal of the rodents from an existing infestation is essential.

The following sections provide basic information about rats and mice, strategies that you can use to help prevent the rodents from getting into your home or business, and guidance for the appropriate control and elimination of a problem should one arise.

Basic information

What are the most common types of rats and mice in Dane County?

- Norway rat (Brown rat) has dark brown to black fur and large bodies.
- Roof rat (Black rat) has a uniform fur color of grey, brown, or black and small bodies with long tails.
- House mouse has a small body with dusty grey to brown fur.
- Each of these rodent types can produce a tremendous number of offspring

Where do rats and mice live outside?

- Under wood piles or lumber that is not being used often
- Under bushes, vines and in tall grasses that are not trimmed or cut back
- In cars, appliances and furniture that has been put outside and is no longer being used
- In and around trash and garbage that has been left on the ground
- In holes under buildings

Where do rats and mice live inside my home?

- In the insulation of walls or ceilings
- Inside the crawl spaces
- Behind or under cupboards, counters, bathtubs and shower stalls
- Near hot water heaters and furnaces
- In basements, attics and wherever things are stored in boxes, paper or cloth

What foods bring these pests into my yard and neighborhood?

- Garbage that rats can get into, like garbage cans with loose lids, plastic or paper bags, and litter.
- Food for pets and birds that has not been eaten. Birdseed on the ground, pet food in pet dishes, bread crumbs, etc.
- Fruits and berries that have fallen to the ground.
- Compost pile or worm bin that isn't taken care of the right way (do not put meat, fish, poultry, or dairy in the compost)
- Dog droppings

What do rats and mice eat when they get inside my house?

- Foods, fats, oils that have been spilled and left on counters, floors, appliances and tables
- Grains, like cereal, oats, rice and vegetables like potatoes and carrots that are in cardboard boxes and plastic bags
- Pet food in boxes or bags
- Any garbage that is not in a can with a tight lid

Prevention

Rats and mice are well adapted to living in human environments. To reduce the risk of unwanted guests in your home:

- Ensure garbage cans lids are closed tightly and are emptied regularly
- Stack fire wood 18 inches off the ground and away from all buildings to minimize nesting and hiding of rodents
- Bird houses and seed should be on poles and in trays
- Regularly clean out sheds and storage areas
- Keep home and property clear of rubbish
- Do not compost any animal products (fish, meat, poultry, cheese, butter, etc.) and keep lids tight
- Dispose of fallen fruit, seed, and waste from your property
- Cover all openings to your house. Rats and mice can get into very small places
- Do not leave pet food outside; if your pet doesn't eat it, rodents will
- Rodents can enter your home from tree branches that hang over your roof. Keep trees and bushes cut back to prevent access

Rats and mice can also live in sewers and can follow food in pipes up to your toilet and sink.

- Keep your kitchen sink rinsed clean and use garbage disposal as little as possible.
- Never throw grease down the kitchen drain.
- Keep your toilet lid down when not in use

Control

If rats and mice are present in your home and/or business there are several steps that can be taken to reduce the potential impact to human health and to remove the infestation.

To protect the health of you and your family (or employees, if a business):

- Secure all foodstuffs in sealed containers
- Throw away all food and drinks that may have come in contact with the rodents
- Cookware and cutlery should be cleaned before use
- Wash hands thoroughly before preparing food, eating, or drinking.
- Wear shoes around the house and do not sleep or lie down on the floor
- If you are bitten by a rat or mouse, contact a physician immediately

Trapping is recommended over poisons to remove rats and mice from your home. The best trap is the large, simple, “**snap trap**” or “**glue board**”. They are sold in hardware stores.

To use the snap trap:

- *BAIT IT* with pieces of apple, potato, raw bacon, or with peanut butter spread on a cotton ball
- *ATTACH IT* firmly to the ground or solid place to keep the rodent from dragging the trap away
- *PLACE THE TRAP* near where you have found rodent droppings
- *MAKE SURE* the trap is safe from people (especially children), pets, and other animals that could be hurt from the trap

To use the glue board:

- *PLACE THE TRAP* near where you have found droppings. Place them in areas along walls and away from foot traffic.
- *MAKE SURE* glue boards are inaccessible to children, pets, and other animals

POISONS ARE NOT RECOMMENDED for the control of rats and mice because children and other animals may eat the poison and become ill, or in some cases, die. Also, poisoned rodents can die in hard to reach places causing a very bad smell. If poisons are to be used, contact a qualified pest control company.

DEAD RODENTS must be first wrapped in newspaper, or placed in a plastic bag before putting the animal in the garbage. Injured or sick rodents *must be killed*. Try not to touch the dead rodents and use gloves if possible.

WASH YOUR HANDS WITH HOT WATER AND SOAP AFTER DISPOSAL OF THE RODENT (even if you wore gloves).

Prepared by: Jeffery S. Lafferty, Environmental Health Epidemiologist
John S. Hausbeck, Environmental Health Supervisor